THE INDIAN BRIDE.

By Mrs. FORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Rajah Doulah was famed throughout all the East for the magnificence of his court and the extent of his domains. But he possessed one treasure which made him even more celebrated—an only daughter, whose beauty was the theme of applause from Ispahan to Pekin. She was said to be purer than the blossoms of the Agla, and sweeter than the fairest roses of Sheeraz; while her voice rivalled in harmony the song of the bulbul.

Many had been the suitors for the Rajah's daughter, but none of them were deemed sufficiently powerful by the divan to be worthy of her hand. At length the eldest son of the Rajah of Auranzal appeared as a suitor for her hand. He was rich, brave, and wealthy, the heir of a mighty prince, and himself a soldier of renown. The Arab steed which he rode was said to be fleeter than the fleetest in the stables of the Lord of Stamboul; and the scymetar which he carried at his side was studded with jewels which would have ransomed a Sultan. The divan listened to his proposals favorably; and the fair Haidai heard of him, in the seclusion of her harem, with a smile of approval. The Rajah gave his word to the suitor, that when another year should have elapsed and Haidai grown into womanhood, for as yet she was but a girl, she should become his bride. With a glad heart the young prince left the capital, followed by his gorgeous train of spahis, and returned to his father's court to await the expiration of the year.

The young Haidai was only a child when all this had been arranged, but she was at that age when a few months work a great change in the character, and ere the year was up she had grown into a woman. She had never seen her future lord, and as the period of her nuptials approached, she began to be curious to behold him; but the seclusion in which she had been brought up, and the implicit obedience which

the daughters of her house were taught to yield to their parent and monarch, prevented this curiosity from attaining much strength. Still there were indefinite yearnings in the heart of the young princess—yearnings such as all feel, in the morning of life, for sympathy and love.

The preparations for the nuptials now began, and both capitals resounded with the fame of the unrivalled magnificence of the approaching ceremony. Rich shawls from Cashmere, the rarest birds of Persia, the finest muslins of the Deccan, diamonds from Golconda, and pearls from the Indian sea, were said to form part of the gifts for the bride; while the citizens of her father's capital talked of the superb white elephants, the housings of velvet and gold, the train of slaves, and the other costly preparations for the cavalcade which was to convey the Rajah's daughter to her future lord.

Secluded from the bustle of the town, Haidai dwelt, during these preparations, in the little summer palace where she had spent her childhood. It was a beautiful structure, shaded by fragrant trees, situated on the side of a mountain lake, and embosomed in a garden of the most rare and delicate flowers. Birds of golden plumage sang all night long around this enchanted bower, and the stars shimmered soft and silvery in the placid lake. In the heat of noonday fountains tinkled in the marble courts, diffusing a delicious freshness around. Here Haidai spent her hours in listening to the songs of her slaves, or indulging in vague dreams of love and happiness; and often she caught herself wondering whether her future lord would realize the vague ideal beauty which she had longed for in her visions.

Only a month yet elapsed to the nuptials when a message came from the Rajah for his daughter to visit the city in order to select for herself dresses of the richest pattern for the approaching fdh. The distance was but a few hour's journey, and a troop of spahis was sent to escort her, more as a mark of her rank than to defend her from attack, for such a thing was deemed preposterous in the peaceable dominions of the Rajah.

Disappointed love, however, will venture any expedient to ensure revenge; and a neighboring prince who had vainly sought for the hand of Haidai, hearing of the contemplated journey, resolved to possess himself of the young beauty. Accordingly he mustered together his guard, and avoiding the open parts of his neighbor's country, penetrated unknown into the very heart of the province, and waylaid the cavalcade and spahis, in a narrow pass near the foot of the mountain, on which the summer palace of the Rajah stood.

The litter of Haidai was slowly descending the hill side, and the young princess was laughing at a sally by one of her slaves, when the practised eye of the captain of her guard detected the spear heads of the ambuscade through the trees in front Consternation instantly took possession of her followers, and especially of herself, for the object of the attack was at once comprehended, and the leader of the assailants was famed for his cruelty, outrages, and hideous appearance. Haidai shuddered when she thought of him as her future lord, and exhorted her comparatively small troop of spahis to defend her to the last They swore so to do, or at least to keep the enemy engaged until her slaves should bear her off by a bye-road to a place of safety—for the country was studded by the fortresses of her father, and it would be impossible to travel many leagues in any direction without falling in with one or more of them.

"By the beard of the Prophet," said the captain of the spahis, « her highness shall be saved, even if we all die in her defence—ho! Allah shows the way— charge the mauraders."

Down, like an avalanche from the bill, swept that dauntless troop; but like a rock in the valley the mailed mauraders met them, so that the inconsiderable force of the young princess's guard was broken into fragments. Long and desperately they fought; but all in vain; for the overpowering numbers of the assailants hemmed them in on every side, hewing them down like rushes that the north winds prostrate along the b anks of the Indus. The little troop was soon cut in pieces,

and the litter of the princess overtaken. Her few personal slaves were slaughtered in cold blood, and she found herself in the power of her captor without a single one of her train left even to perform the necessary services due to one of her high rank.

CHAPTER II.

We shall not attempt to describe the emotions of Haidai when her captor approached her. All of evil which she had heard respecting him was more than verified by his appearance. He had already passed the meridian of his existence, and the crimes of a long life had left themselves indelibly impressed on his countenance, which was forbidding to the last degree. She shrank instinctively from his presence.

“Fair daughter of the sun,” said he, affecting a gallantry to which he was a stranger, “the fortune of war Has placed you in my hands—and henceforth you will be the light of my eyes, the flower of my harem. Long have I loved you, and now it shall be my task only to do your bidding.”

“If such be your wish,” said Haidai, with an energy. she thought would have been a stranger to her nature, “conduct me to my father’s court.”

“Nay—by the Kabala—not so,” said heir captor, with a hideous smile, “the fountains of my harem pine for your presence.”

The captive princess saw in the exulting look of her captor the confirmation of her worst fears, and she sank back on her cushions with a shudder.

All that day they retreated through secluded ways toward the frontiers of the province, and at nightfall were almost clear of the dominions of the Rajah. As Haidai saw the hills where she had spent her childhood fading in the distance, her heart grew cold within her, and the faint hope which she had entertained of a rescue died away, until at length

she was left in total despair.

Suddenly, however, she heard a commotion among her capturers, and soon perceived that they were forming in the rear of the litter as if to protect it from assault. Could succor have arrived? Her heart beat quicker at the supposition. She was not left long in doubt, for in a few minutes she heard distinctly the clash of steel, and all the tumult of a fight. Instantaneously two or three horsemen dashed back toward the litter, and ordered it to retreat at an accelerated pace, by a byeroad apparently hidden from general observation, so much did it look like a mere indentation in the hill. The bearers plunged into the dark narrow lane on the word, and directly were completely hidden from observation, while the shouts of the combatants, and the clashing of their sabres grew fainter on the ear. The sudden hope which had been aroused in Haidai's bosom hy the appearance of succor now gave way; her despair became uncontrollable; and for the first time since her capture she gave way to a flood of tears.

She was recalled to her recollection at length by the sound as of some one dashing through a neighboring jungle, and on the instant she beheld a horsemen emerge at full speed into the narrow lane, followed by three or four spahis. She saw at once they had come to her rescue, for they charged instantly on the bearers, one or two of whom they cut down in a twinkling, the rest only saving themselves by flight. In less time than we have taken to describe it the field had been cleared, and Haidai remained alone with her rescuers. The scene had passed so quick that it seemed like a dream. Their leader instantly advanced toward her. With the instinctive modesty of her sex she drew her veil still closer around her, yet not so close but she could notice the manly form and gallant bearing of the officer who now approached her.

"Will your highness," said he, "entrust yourself to us—my spahis shall bear you to the main body, which has, I trust, driven your captors from the field. Luckily' I saw you borne down this narrow bye-lane, and came to your rescue."

There was something so musical in the deep rich tone of the speaker—something so deferential in his demeanor that the princess was taken by surprise, and remained silent for a moment. At length she spoke.

“You have won the thanks of the Rajah, and of,” and she hesitated, she knew not why, and then continued, “myself for your gallantry. Be assured we shall not forget it—ask any boon—promotion, wealth, anything —and I will ensure it to you.”

Hit is enough to have saved you,” said the officer, with a devotion the princess could not fail to perceive, and yet a devotion tempered with such humility that she could not fine! offence at it. Sh6 blushed deeply at his words, but made no reply, only motioning her hand to signify that die was willing to submit herself to his care.

The spahis at once assumed the place of bearers, and the little cavalcade moved briskly back toward the road they had left. As they approached it they heard the clattering of horses’ hoofs, and soon found themselves surrounded by a troop of cavalry which Haidai recognized as belonging to her father. Immediately the troops parted, and an officer approached, whom she knew as one in high rank at her father’s court. In measured and stately terms he assured her of her safety. But when he had finished his pompous harangue, and she looked around for her real deliverer, she found that he was no longer to be seen.

CHAPTER III.

Who can fathom the thousand shapes which Love assumes, or the ten thousand avenues through which he finds his way to the heart? Haidai hitherto had never loved, her heart had been as free as her own mountain air, and she had yielded passively to her father’s wish for her marriage, as much because she knew nothing of the passion as because such was the custom of her nation. Now, however, she

regarded her approaching union in a different light. Even since the night when the unknown young soldier had rescued her from the hands of her captors, she had dwelt upon his image with an interest which was a puzzle even to herself. And yet, though she made many efforts, she could not drive him from her heart. His manly figure was always before her. His low deep musical voice was ever ringing in her ears. She saw him constantly in her memory, as he appeared when he approached her, after having saved her from the hands of her captor. That look of lofty courage tempered with deferential awe recurred to her when sitting among her slaves, or idling the afternoon away on her divan. Was she not in love?

It may seem strange, but Haidai had never since seen or heard of her deliverer. Yet when we call to mind the seclusion in which an oriental princess spends her days our wonder diminishes. Haidai had ventured indeed once or twice a hint respecting him, but she found that her father's high officer had taken all the credit to himself, and that the merit of her deliverer was in fact unknown. Thus discouraged in her enquiries, the princess .hesitated to ask further; especially since the emotions of love which already had possession of her bosom, made her shrink with instinctive delicacy from questions which might betray her feelings.

Love nursed in secret has no cure, since it lives on the ideal perfection of its object, and that ideal perfection is never destroyed by the reality. Thus the love of Haidai increased until it had attained an intensity which threatened to consume her being. Her usual amusements failed to yield her pleasure; she no longer smiled when her slaves danced around her; but she would sit for hours on her cushions, wrapped in a reverie which nothing seemed sufficiently powerful to dissipate. And daily she pined away. Her melancholy was increased by the approach of her union, since she no longer had a heart to bestow on her future husband. Oh! what would she have given could she have remained in her father's palace, faithful in heart to him she loved, faithful until death should perhaps unite her to him forever.

Yes! she loved an unknown being, perhaps only a common officer in her father's troops. Yet whatever his rank might be, she felt assured he was by nature noble. That one look at his manly form had left a conviction on her of his loftiness of soul which nothing could dissipate.

Her father noticed her increasing despondency, but attributed it to the natural feelings of one about to leave her home, and enter upon a new and untried sphere. He therefore only rallied her on her melancholy, and strove to dissipate it by describing to her the magnificent preparations which were making for her in the palace of her future lord. Ah! little did her father know how his words increased the agony of her heart.

At length the fatal day came when the princess was to set forth to her affianced husband. Gorgeous was the cavalcade, glad were the shouts of the populace, and splendid were the jewels in which she was decked—but she went forth like a lamb to the sacrifice, and she wept amid all her magnificence. Her attendants strove to console her but it was in vain. Oh! how she wished, as she drew nearer to the end of her journey, that she had told all to her father, and thrown herself on his mercy: but a moment's reflection convinced her that it would have been useless, and that the Rajah would have deemed it madness for her to love a common soldier of his army. So the heart-broken Haidai could only weep more and more bitterly.

It was a golden evening when the cavalcade reached the plain before the capital of her husband's father, where the most magnificent preparations had been made to greet the bride. A costly pavilion, blazing with jewels and gold, had been pitched just outside the gates of the city. This pavilion was surrounded by high officers of state, and troops of gallant cavalry, their bright sabres glistening in the setting sun. A vast concourse of people filled up the outskirts of the crowd, while triumphal music filled the air with harmony. It seemed indeed as if the whole city had been poured forth to greet their future queen—as, if all that power and splendor and wealth could do, had been done, to

render her reception worthy of her peerless beauty. But all this magnificence only increased the agony of Haidai's heart, by calling up more forcibly the conviction of her sacrifice.

As the cavalcade proceeded, the troops around the pavilion parted, leaving a passage for the bride and her attendants up to the door. With trembling steps Haidai alighted, as the cymbals struck up, and her favorite attendant whispered in her ear that her princely lover awaited her just within the door of the pavilion. She dared not look up, but mechanically obeying the intimation, she moved forward, amid the sound of music, and the shouts of the populace. She reached the door of the pavilion—she tottered across the threshold—but when she had gone thus far her attendant suddenly left her side, and she became conscious that the curtain, which closed the entrance to the pavilion, had been dropped behind her. It needed nothing to tell her that she was alone with her future lord; and she felt as if she would sink fainting to the earth. As a quick footstep met her ear she made a last effort to look up. What caused that cry of mingled wonder and delight? Why did she, who had so lately shrunk from this interview, spring forward to the arms of one who approached her? Why—but that she recognized in her princely lord the unknown soldier who had rescued her in the pass Djeerade.

Our tale is done. It requires little explanation. The young prince had more than once visited the Rajah's court in disguise, in order that he might behold his future bride; and it was while on one of those visits that intelligence had been received of her capture. He joined the party sent to her rescue as a volunteer and incognito; and we have seen how he succeeded in personally saving her from the hands of her rapacious captor. It was easy for him to disguise his connexion with the expedition, which he did.

That night the two lovers sat together in the palace of the prince, with hands linked in each others, gazing out on the moonlit river, that lay like a sheet of silver, beneath the balcony. With her bridal gems around her, and the light of happiness in her eyes, Haidai sat listening

to her lover’s narration, repeated for the twentieth time. And often as he told how her beauty had won his heart long ago, her cheek would flush, and with a smile of gladness wreathing her lovely mouth, she would turn for a moment from her lover’s face, and look out across the sleeping waters. But it would be only for a moment. Had you seen her then, you would have said indeed that mortal painter could not do justice to the surpassing loveliness of the Indian Bride.

THE LADY’S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.